



TO be what we are and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life.

—Robert Louis Stevenson.

The Messenger Maid

BY HELEN WALLACE

(Continued from last week.)

CHILDREN must obey their elders, and speak when they were spoken to, so she answered Major Walsh's questions quietly till, looking down into the little snowdrop face, he grew half-ashamed, tough soldier and keen upon his quest as he was, of baiting the child further, and trying to draw from her if she had any subtler errand to the lady of Ledington than the showing of the sampler. He had ensured that no note had been sent with it, and after all they could know nothing fresh of his plans at Calderdale.

Arrived at Ledington, he even carried his complaisance so far as to conduct Isabel up the corkscrew stair to my lady's chamber door.

"Here's little Miss from Calderdale with something to show to your mistress," he said brusquely to the startled waiting woman. "She can have ten minutes," and he clattered down the steep stair again.

With her heart drumming and her lips tingling from the kiss Major Walsh had exacted in payment, Isabel tiptoed across the big bedroom, with its Dutch hangings of hunting scenes in stamped and gilded leather. In a great four-post bed an old lady was sitting up very erect for an invalid. "So we've got a respite," she said, with a quick, hard breath.

With tremulous steps, Isabel approached the canopied bed, feeling, perhaps, as at that moment she looked like little Red Riding Hood paying her famous visit, and, indeed, many older than she trembled before the old lady's keen dark eyes, looking out from under the multitudinous lawn frills of her mob-cap. The sampler was examined and admired, but as soon as the heavy footfalls without had fairly died away, her voice and look changed.

"Quick, child, you've some message," she said only ten minutes; 'tis a wonder he let us have them. Since you've been trusted with it, I'll trust you, too. The one it most concerns had better hear it too."

With her long ebony-handled staff, she rapped sharply on the wainscot thrice in succession. There was a moment's pause, then there came a faint scratching, like a mouse, behind the panels. The old lady rapped again, and Isabel's dilated eyes opened still wider, for the great gilded stag bounding across the wall in front of her, suddenly disappeared, leaving a narrow, gaping doorway.

"Oh!" gasped Isabel, and "Oh!" she gasped again, as out of the darkness stepped a tall young man. But Isabel had no longer eyes for the stag, nor any heed for the mystery of the cunningly-hidden door. Her eyes and thoughts were wholly riveted on the

newcomer, and little wonder, for Nigel Maitland was reckoned the "bravest lad" of his time in broad Scotland. It was not the well-cut features, though, nor the curling hair and the handsome eyes, which held the child's gaze, and, all unknown to herself, unsealed within her the fountain of romance. Rather it was the high daring of his look, the glad, gay courage which danced in these fine eyes, so that, worn and wan and wounded as he was, his entrance from his dark lurking-place seemed to bring a whiff of new life, bracing as mountain air,



A Good Start Toward Helping Mother With the Milking.

reviving as wine into the big, dull room. Isabel, too young to analyse her own thoughts, gazed open-eyed, the old lady sat more erect among her pillows, her eyes lit up.

"Now, bairn, out with your message," she said sharply. "I'm trusting you far, and every minute's a life."

Thus adjured, Isabel repeated her mother's words.

"She said I was to say that there must be nobody in Ledington to-night—nobody but those who belong to it."

The gay, bright eyes were fixed now on her earnest face framed in the scarlet hood. "And did she say why, little lady?" he asked.

"No, but she said it was life or death. I think she's feared of Major Walsh. He's a dreadful man; he brought me here on his saddle"—with a quick shiver—"and he'll have to take me back," her voice sinking.

"Tell your lady-mother she's had a brave little messenger, and take her my thanks from my heart for her care of my poor life," said Maitland. "And so this is what you were to show to your granny-aunt?" picking up the

sampler, after a question or two had brought out the whole story.

"Nigel, are ye daft?" cried the old lady from the bed. "He gave us ten minutes. When he comes back he may bring his dragons with him, and this time I'm doubting I'll no' be let keep my chamber-door fast against him."

The young man turned on her with a smile.

"Never fear, there'll be 'nobody' in Ledington very soon but those who belong to it; but as my next lurking-place must be the family vault in the kirkyard, you can't wonder I'm in no hurry to mark it. Who knows but it may be my final refuge, unless Sandy Greer brings his yawl the sooner round St. Abb's Head. No, no, we'll cheat them yet," hastily as the aged face changed woefully at his light words. "And so you are Isabel Calder, and you've done all this wonderful work," reading the doggerel lines as he turned again to the child. "I shall never forget you, Isabel, nor the great service you have done me; and who knows," with a smile, which to Isabel illuminated the room or the world—it was all one then—"who knows but some day I may be able to deliver you from Major Walsh or some other dragon. And now promise, you won't quite forget me."

"I never forget," said the child gravely, and as he stooped over her he took her hands, and kissed one and then the other. Sky Isabel suddenly put her fresh lips to his cheek, then, darting away, buried her face in the coverlet of the great bed.

Whack! a heavy riding-switch descended sharply with a resounding

give thanks," he joined the thin trickle of worshippers entering the great south door.

But he was no Catholic, and the service already going on did not hold him long. Presently he wandered down the vast nave till the lights on the altar seemed but a dim twinkle in the distance; then turning into a little memorial chapel, he seated himself behind the great pillar at the entrance. He would faint be alone with his thoughts, and he had cause enough, as he had said, for thought and for thanksgiving.

Time, the healer, had for ten long years been doing his work. Culloden was but a bitter memory. King George sat secure upon his throne, and by degrees the proscribed Jacobites were being allowed to return to their own country. Among those to whom this boon had been extended was Nigel Maitland, who, thanks to powerful friends, house and lands were to be restored to him. But it would be an empty house to which he would return and a changed countryside. There was no one of his name to welcome him to Ledington. Culloden was the hands of strangers. Then his thoughts wandered back across the gulf of the years to that memorable day, when on a child's warning he had escaped with bare life from Ledington.

There was she now, that child who would be a child no longer! Her father he knew had been executioner soon after his own escape, then some years later, when he was far away in Spain fighting the battles of France, since he might not fight for his own king, he had heard of Sir Hugh Calder's death. The war over at last, he sought to find the widow and the orphan child to whom he owed so much, but he could find no trace of them. The fall, crowded years of a soldier's life had rolled on like an effacing tide over these tender memories, yet he had never wholly forgotten a child's pure face, a child's innocent kiss, which had indeed more than once been like a protecting talisman carrying him scathless through many a wild scene of revelry.

Now on the eve of his return to the old surroundings (he was only waiting for the next packet to Leith) how clearly that last memory came back to him out of the mists of the past, even to the quaint sampler spread on the big bed in the great gilded bedroom. But clearest of all was the little trembling figure, and the young steadfast face framed in a scarlet hood, whose must be sweet mail now, wherever she be, he mused, recalling the dark, wistful eyes. "I never forget," she had said. Ah, if such a fair, gracious presence had been awaiting him at Ledington or returning to the old manor by his side, what a different home-coming it would be.

Suddenly voices from behind the pillar struck through his thoughts.

"Can I not be alone, even here?" said a girl's voice.

"Pshaw! we are disturbing no one. We must come to an understanding—us men, where as anywhere else," said a man's deep, hoarse voice.

"An understanding? To mislead or to give you the least cause to misunderstand me," came the retort, swift and sharp.

"You know it is your mother's dearest wish," went on the man as though he had not heard. "Does that not weigh with you now?" significantly.

"Ah, my poor mother!" bitterly. "And she thinks she had good reason to urge it," said the other with the same heavy significance.

(Concluded next week.)